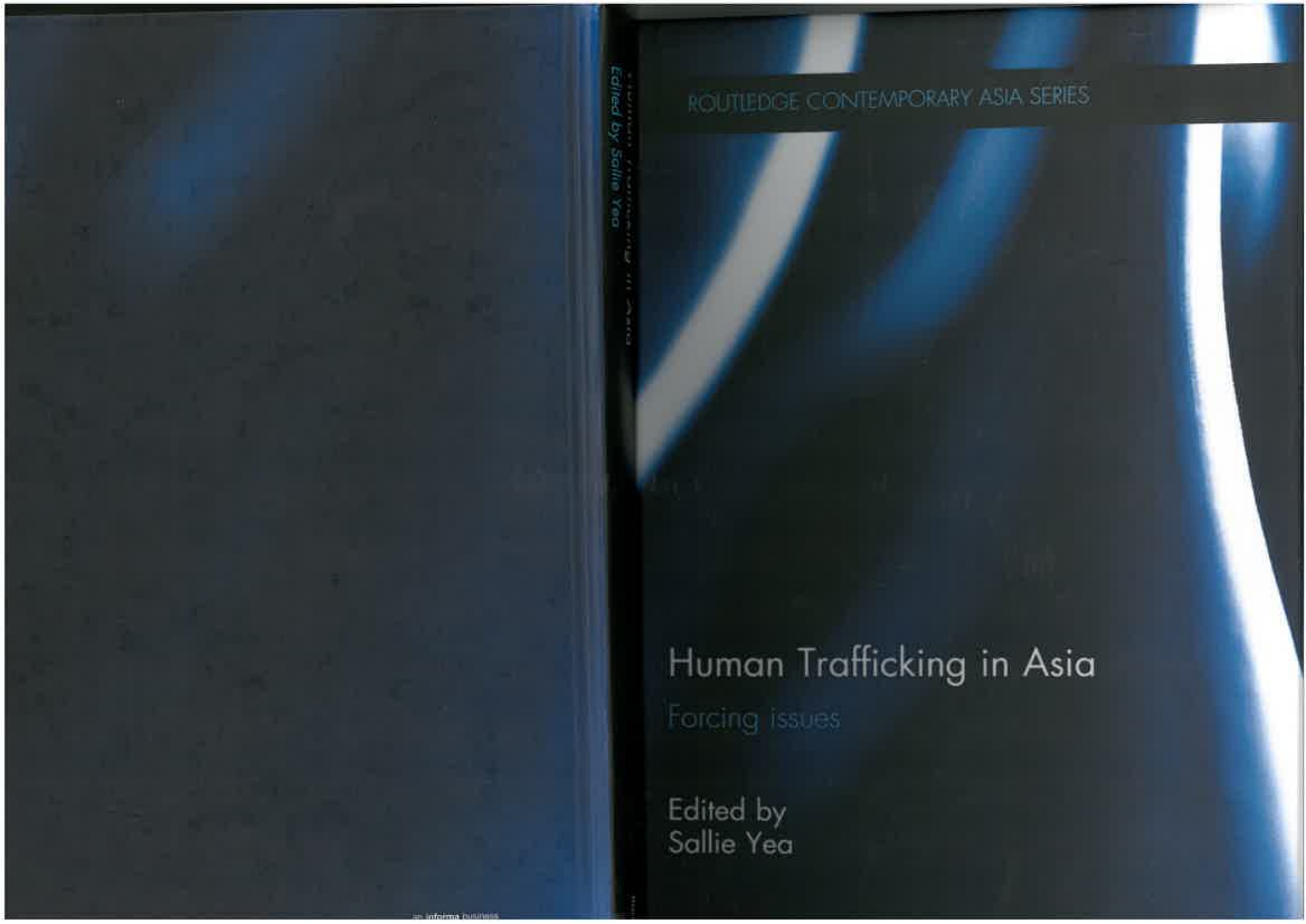
ROUTLEDGE CONTEMPORARY ASIA SERIES
Human Trafficking in Asia
Forcing issues
Edited by
Sallie Yea
Edited by Sallie Yea

Human Trafficking in Asia

By analysing the complex issues surrounding internal and cross-border human trafficking in Asia and asserting critical perspectives and methodologies, this book extends the range of sites for discussion and sectors in which human trafficking takes place.

The book re-centres human trafficking as an area of legitimate academic inquiry in a region that is often considered as an epicentre for human trafficking: East and Southeast Asia. It thus offers an in-depth analysis and up-to-date knowledge on research methodologies and engagements, patterns and forms of human trafficking, constructively critiquing anti-trafficking campaigns and discourses, and offering examples of good practice within the region that help us move beyond the impasse that currently hampers human trafficking as a field of inquiry in the social sciences.

Providing constructive avenues for human trafficking research to proceed methodologically, theoretically and ethically, this book is of interest to students and scholars of Politics, International Relations and Southeast Asian Studies.

Sallie Yea is Assistant Professor in Human Geography at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

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Dedicated to Pattana Kitiarsa (1968–2012) – a dear friend and remarkable ethnographer.

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7 In search of the perfect method

Reflections on knowing, seeing, measuring and estimating human trafficking

Sverre Molland

> Theory without data is empty, but data without theory are blind.
> C. Wright Mills (quoted in Eriksen 2010: 27)

Introduction

Arguably one of the largest controversies regarding human trafficking is the question of the numbers and scale of the phenomenon. On the one hand, numerous unsubstantiated claims are being made, such as 'trafficking in women and girls for purposes of sexual exploitation has become a $16-billion-a-year business in Latin America' (UNODC 2008: 7); and 'An estimated 2.5 million people are in forced labour (including sexual exploitation) at any given time' (United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking 2006). At the same time, several policy practitioners and academics alike are questioning the validity of these claims, highlighting that numbers are grabbed out of thin air in the context of moralistic hyperbole. Pointing out moral philosophical and political agendas underpinning much of the construction of trafficking – and the dubious claims to knowledge that eventuate – has become a preoccupation in itself (Kempadoo *et al.* 2005; Weitzer 2005; Zhang 2009; Savona and Stefanizzi 2007). Yet, surprisingly this critical questioning of the enumeration of human trafficking as a problem has not resulted in much serious research on the anti-trafficking industry, with a few notable exceptions (Rosga 2005; Agustín 2007). To date, critiques of trafficking discourse tend to limit themselves to a narrow focus on prostitution and migration policies where questions of criminalisation and legalisation are endlessly debated (Doezema 2010; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Gallagher 2001). In other words, these debates consider *ideological* underpinnings of anti-trafficking as opposed to examining the *institutional* context which enables particular anti-trafficking activities to take place. Few researchers have considered the broader question of how trafficking laws, policies and programmes translate into practice; that is, placing a serious focus on the practice of anti-trafficking in itself.

Instead, the main focus within trafficking research remains an attempt to peel off moralistic and ideological layers that cloud our vision. Ironically, by placing emphasis on 'dispelling myths' (Feingold 2005) regarding trafficking, these critics come uncomfortably close to giving life to what they seek to demolish. In

the very act of showing the constructed nature of trafficking, it is always implied that underneath all these misconceptions the 'real nature' of trafficking can be revealed, thereby cementing an essentialist ontology of human trafficking. For example, within some anti-trafficking circles in Southeast Asia and South Asia, it has become fashionable to refer to 'the second paradigm' of trafficking, which denotes an older, presumably more naïve view of trafficking, which has now been replaced by a more sophisticated model (International Organization for Migration 2004; Shangera *et al.* 2005).[1] Hence, the recognition of the moral and ideological underpinnings of trafficking does not result in abandoning human trafficking as a point of gravity for research and policy implementation but quite the opposite: it becomes a site of perpetual knowledge production and targeted programmes. Hence, the trafficking debate remains essentially an instrumental one where the focus is on 'how to get our tools right' to more accurately understand, know and design appropriate policy responses.

It is in this context that the question of methodology becomes relevant as efforts to advance both the combat and research of trafficking presuppose epistemological advances. In this vein, several scholars have attempted to come up with methods for studying trafficking (Brunovskis and Tyldum 2005; Steinfatt and Baker 2011; Laczko and Gramegna 2003). Within the anti-trafficking industry itself, the Mekong region has been particularly prominent in terms of various organisations and applied researchers launching novel instruments for data collection and research on trafficking in persons.

This chapter seeks to explore these emergent forms of knowledge production. More specifically, various attempts at developing methodologies for measuring and estimating human trafficking are examined. The argument advanced is that, rather than engaging in searches for technically sophisticated tools to improve modes in which anti-trafficking programmes can detect and measure trafficking, what is required is a much more careful institutional reflexivity of why anti-trafficking research takes the forms it does. I suggest that these new anti-trafficking methods reflect specific institutional logics. In the process, a discourse of human trafficking is reified and a certain conservatism is maintained, which predisposes anti-trafficking programmes to operate in specific ways. In other words, efforts to assist trafficked persons identified as victims are not necessarily served by endless fine tuning of survey methods and other methodologies to measure and detect trafficking. My aim here is not to merely engage in an academic exercise in critiquing policy-driven applied research for the sake of critique. Instead, I seek to interrogate the epistemological obviousness of recent trafficking research that has been carried out by anti-trafficking programmes in the Mekong region. In so doing, I hope to invite a more careful reflection upon how research is embedded within a broader political economy of anti-trafficking programming.

I first outline some observations of the ways in which anti-trafficking research is carried out. I then go on to consider recent anti-trafficking studies in the Mekong region, to elucidate several assumptions contained in such surveys. Before concluding, I provide a discussion of how these research methods are shaped by particular institutional factors and the effects that eventuate from them.

Trafficking research: from a revelatory logic to a totalising gaze

It has recently been pointed out that an important mode of evidence making in trafficking takes the form of visual imagery, evidenced in newspaper reporting, movies and documentary film making (Lindquist 2010; Soderlund 2011; Lainez 2010). The exposé has become a central trope in making human trafficking manifest to the world. This point is well taken. However, at the same time, at a programmatic level the last few years have seen numerous attempts at making trafficking knowable through large-scale survey-type instruments. In the Mekong region, which is arguably one of the world's largest hubs of anti-trafficking initiatives, there are several efforts documenting, researching, measuring and estimating trafficking numbers (Steinfatt and Baker 2011; JHSPH Center for Refugee and Disaster Response and LPN 2010; An Gian University 2011; UNICEF 2004; ILO 2003; UNESCO n.d.).[2]

In stark contrast to investigative journalism and revelatory documentaries, these surveys are commonly highly positivist in style and go beyond journalistic voyeurism and film making, in the sense that they attempt not only to reveal that trafficking exists but to unravel its locations, size and prevalence for the purpose of improved programming. In other words, these surveys strive for methods which can permeate the social body to track trafficking trends and, as such, constitute panoptical instruments for surveillance in the Foucauldian sense (Foucault 1977). Just as the state can be understood through metaphors of a vertical totalising encompassment (Ferguson and Gupta 2002), these trafficking surveys strive for a birds-eye view legibility of traffickers and victims within a given territorial unit.[3] This is in itself unsurprising, as anti-trafficking organisations not only work closely with state actors but, in many respects, echo state functions in the sense that programmatic action presupposes particular modes of seeing and knowing the world which furnishes policy directives. This is particularly the case with several United Nations (UN) agencies, as their operational mandates are often closely aligned with respective states. UN agencies not only operate on invitation by host governments but also represent sovereign nation states. Hence, their work involves intimate collaboration with ministries and it should come as no surprise that UN agencies are predisposed to 'see like a state' (Scott 1998) in light of policy implementation and programming.

Before I elaborate this point, more context is required. In what follows, I describe two recent attempts at launching new and improved methods for measuring trafficking in the Mekong region and consider some of the inherent problems that such endeavours produce.

The 'empirisation' of trafficking research

At first glance, it seems as if data collection and knowledge production within the anti-trafficking community in the Mekong region have grown increasingly sophisticated. Whereas, in the past, it was commonplace to either grab numbers out of thin air or carry out trafficking research by relying on popular media reports or interviewing 'experts' within the anti-trafficking field (and thereby

produce dubious estimates), this has now become heavily criticised with the anti-trafficking sector itself. As one UN official once told me, 'all these trafficking researchers who run around interviewing trafficking organisations aren't researching trafficking. They are mistaking the research of trafficking organisations for trafficking research'. Allowing trafficking 'guestimates' by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and law enforcement officials to pass as credible research has therefore become untenable (Savona and Stefanizzi 2007; Zhang 2009), which is partly recognised within the anti-trafficking sector itself. For this reason, at least within larger UN aid agencies, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), primary data collection has become increasingly common.

Although it is correct to point out that unsubstantiated trafficking 'guestimates' are often being made within abolitionist quarters and organisations concerned with border security, it is important to recognise that this is not easily explained by ideological critiques of abolitionist and border-control bias within anti-trafficking discourse. The importance of 'better data' – often heavily coated in positivist language – is evident within numerous political–moral stands on trafficking, ranging from organisations that advocate for the abolition of prostitution to sex workers rights groups to programmes who advocate for legalising labour migration and others who suggest tightened border controls. For example, both the abolitionist organisation Agir Pour Les Femmes En Situation Précaire (AFESIP) and researchers who critique them (Steinfatt and Baker 2011) base their arguments in light of claims to 'science'.[4] Similarly, organisations that advocate for legalised labour migration, such as the ILO, are actually collaborating on joint research projects with governments, such as the government of Laos, which enforce strict border control policies on trafficking (ILO 2003). As such, scientific positivism and repeated calls for better and more rigorous trafficking research have a doxic (Bourdieu 1977) character as the call for better data is in itself beyond the realm of dispute.[5] Hence, scholars who emphasise ideological bias in trafficking research (Sandy 2012) miss an important underlying logic for the perpetual design of methods and production of estimates.

Arguably one of the key organisations advocating for strengthened research on trafficking in the Mekong region has been the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP). Since the mid 2000s, UNIAP has been central in bringing to life a range of initiatives which aim to 'strengthen the knowledge base' on human trafficking. Of course, UNIAP is not the only organisation engaging in large-scale trafficking research. Both the ILO and UNICEF have over the last years carried out large scale research programmes in the Mekong region (UNICEF 2004; ILO 2003) and the International Organization for Migration, as well as the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have developed databases on trafficking. Yet, UNIAP is particularly interesting as the programme has not merely carried out various research projects on trafficking but explicitly attempted to engage the broader anti-trafficking community in search for improved methodologies within trafficking research. In other words, UNIAP has been central in 'empiricising' trafficking research.

Part of the reason why UNIAP places emphasis on research is that it plays a coordinating role on trafficking which involves close collaboration with not only other UN agencies and NGOs but also state agencies in the Mekong region. Owing to its coordination role, it becomes predisposed to place focus on broad policy responses to trafficking within the Mekong countries, defining itself as a knowledge-hub on trafficking. As coordination presupposes *knowledge* of both trafficking (trends, scale, patterns) and anti-trafficking (i.e. appropriate responses and interventions) research and scientific credentials within the anti-trafficking community become central to the project's legitimacy. Coupled with close collaboration with Mekong governments,[6] trafficking research to some extent echoes the state's synoptic gaze. As I have previously mentioned, when programmatic logics are intertwined with state institutions, data collection is premised on an epistemology of vertical spatial encompassment. It is this institutional backdrop which explains why there has been several initiatives to design and improve ways in which trafficking can be measured. It is therefore no surprise that one of the first initiatives in building a broader platform for anti-trafficking research was a methods contest convened by the UNIAP project which aimed at measuring trafficking in the Mekong region.

Trafficking contests, estimates and methods

In 2007, the UNIAP project launched the 'UNIAP trafficking estimates initiative' (UNIAP 2008). The initiative was launched largely in response to the fact that several key officials within several anti-trafficking organisations (many of them with strong social science backgrounds) were growing tired of hyperbole media coverage and inexperienced NGOs implementing activities based on assumption (and even fabrication) rather than empirical evidence. Convening a methods competition on trafficking was a means not only whereby new methodologies were encouraged to come to light but also for advocating within the anti-trafficking community improved research methods to target programming more efficiently for the purpose of assisting victims, identifying perpetrators and reducing overall trafficking numbers. In the words of UNIAP, the aims were:

> First, to address the need for accurate estimates of trafficking victims. This data is needed to understand the scale of the problem in different areas and industries, in order to inform intervention design and prioritization... Second, the competitive format aimed to attract quality statistical and research expertise to the field of human counter-trafficking – a field where the lack of reliable quantitative statistics has widely been acknowledged as an inhibiting factor in counter-trafficking programming.
>
> (UNIAP 2008: 1)

The competition was no doubt ambitious, given that several academics have pointed out that identifying reliable and conclusive estimates involves multiple challenges and may even be impossible (for example, Anderson 2008).[7]

Furthermore, holding a 'methodology' contest is rather peculiar. It introduces a metaphor of sport, thereby implying that research and knowledge is a domain of combat and hierarchical tabulation where there can only be one winner.[8] Such a view of research smacks of naïve empiricism, as it takes methods and techniques for data collection as a starting point for assessing validity and quality of research (which in turn contributes to the reproduction of a universalising trafficking discourse). This is a rather serious flaw. Application of method and methodology cannot be judged on its own terms but is governed by a research question and the particular theoretical framework that is applied, as well as the context in which the research takes place. In other words, one does not start with a technique for data collection but one considers what methods are required to elucidate a particular research problem (which, of course, is shaped by whatever theoretical framework and perspectives within which one is working). Hence, it is the particular theoretical framework and perspectives that give a method its explanatory power, not the specificity of methods in themselves. There is a real 'cart in front of the horse' problem with this approach, which I now elucidate.

Estimating labour trafficking: a study of Burmese migrant workers in Samut Sakhon, Thailand

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a thorough review of all the contestants (but for an analysis of the winner, see Molland 2012). However, in what follows, I consider 'the silver medallist', to elucidate both the way its methodology is articulated but also to examine the type of paradoxes and slippages such instruments eventually produce.

One of the contenders in the trafficking contest carried out research on Burmese migrants workers in Samut Sakhon, Thailand (JHSPH Center for Refugee and Disaster Response and LPN 2010). The research involved an initial 'ethnographic'[9] phase, which involved carrying out semi-structured interviews amongst Burmese migrants. Subsequently, responded-driven sampling based on referrals by migrants (chain referral samples) was used to identify respondents. Based on this methodology, the research concluded that 33.6 per cent of the migrant population in their sample were trafficked victims.

I am not here questioning the use of chain referral samples in itself but what is of interest is the way that the survey instrument was designed to detect cases of human trafficking. As has become commonplace in both research and programme implementation within the anti-trafficking industry, this survey used the definition of trafficking from the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Hereafter the Trafficking Protocol, United Nations 2000) as an heuristic device for designing specific survey questions. All questions within the survey reflect the three main elements of the definition of trafficking within the Trafficking Protocol: *means* (deceit, coercion, etc.), *process* (recruitment, transport, transfer, receipt) and *goal* (exploitation). For example, the second element of method (recruitment, transport, transfer, receipt) was reduced to one simple question: 'Have you used a recruiter or transporter?'

(JHSPH Center for Refugee and Disaster Response and LPN 2010: 43). If a respondent asked affirmatively to at least one of the questions within each of the three elements, then this would be considered to count as trafficking in persons.

No doubt several of the findings are interesting. For example, the research found no significant correlation between ethnicity of labour migrants and the duration of stay in Thailand in relation to severity of abuse. However, it is worth considering more closely the implication of using the definition from the Trafficking Protocol as a proxy for research questions. First of all, by asking 'Have you used a recruiter or transporter?', the research instrument implies these descriptive categories ('recruiter'; 'transporter') to be relevant to the migrants' life-worlds themselves. In doing so, other types of social relationships amongst migrant communities are excluded. By reproducing the Trafficking Protocol in this way (that is, presuming labour migration is facilitated by a recruiter or transporter), it is assumed that there is no such thing as facilitated migration without the use of a broker. As other research has shown, non-consensual recruitment may take place within intimate networks of kin and family (Derks 2008; Sandy 2009; Molland 2011; Molland 2012).[10] This is most puzzling as, although the research found that many migrants use 'recruiters' or 'brokers', the survey also found that: 'In nearly 60% of cases, respondents found their current or previous job through friends and family. Only about 11% reported finding their job through a broker (almost all of these paid money to the broker for this)' (JHSPH Center for Refugee and Disaster Response and LPN 2010: 36).

Since the survey instrument merely reproduces the trafficking definition from the Trafficking Protocol, it overlooks a very interesting insight that begs important questions of the facilitation of mobility; that is, the prevalence of intimate connections in the recruitment process, as well as the use of brokers that does not result in 'trafficking'. Yet, since the instrument dutifully follows the Trafficking Protocol, it cancels out the possibility that informal recruitment can constitute trafficking. The important point here is that rather than 'detecting' trafficking out 'there' one must recognise that the survey instrument takes part in producing its own findings. A singular subjectivity (i.e. a 'recruiter') is *a priori* assumed to exist and is 'discovered' through the survey question, whilst it ignores the larger social context of the operationalisation of mobility. This tendency is particularly evident in how the report claims the various survey questions reveal prevalence of trafficking numbers.

Several case studies are offered in the report but a reader may be puzzled as to how several of the cases do not seem to conform closely with what is implied in legal definitions of trafficking. Some cases demonstrate various forms of labour exploitation and compromised work conditions but without any clear information to how this is linked to labour migration or recruitment. Conversely, cases of deception are shown but without any clear linkage to work conditions. The reason for these seemingly disjointed case studies is explained thus:

> It should be noted that the construction of this variable does not presume that Process, Means and Goal are linked to one specific actor or event, rather that

> a cumulative set of experiences have been identified whereby the component elements of labor trafficking are evident over an unspecified period of time and number of events. One may say that what is being measured is a cumulative risk of labor trafficking among Burmese migrant workers in the seafood processing industry in Samut Sakhon.
>
> (JHSPH Center for Refugee and Disaster Response and LPN 2010: 43)

In other words, the survey asks specific questions relating to the three elements of trafficking and then an *ex post facto* coherence is constructed between these elements. Although the report acknowledges this selective reading of trafficking, it is worth noting that it at the same time diverts from the definition of trafficking on which the whole methodology is based on. The Trafficking Protocol and the whole legal regime in relation to translational organised crime is premised upon the assumption that traffickers knowingly employ non-consensual means to recruit a migrant into an exploitative labour related situation. As such, the Trafficking Protocol has an implicit collusive tone in the way trafficking is constructed, evidenced by the importance of establishing intent of the trafficker in court cases. The paradox in all this is that, instead of letting the misfit between trafficking definitions (the Trafficking Protocol) and its applicability to survey research result in reconsideration of one's methods, subtle manoeuvres are made to make one's data fit a generic and abstract understanding of trafficking which conforms with the Trafficking Protocol. We see here a subtle transformation. What is meant to be a promise of improved research and methods of trafficking turns out to entail an inherent conservatism. Through the process of advancing trafficking research, important discursive parameters (such as the use of the definition within the Trafficking Protocol) are not advanced but *reproduced*. A favourable interpretation would suggest that this is perhaps why the method only received a 'silver medal' in the trafficking methods contest. Yet, similar dynamics are evident in other recent anti-trafficking research.

Sentinel surveillance

Following on from the methods competition, UNIAP published another research report where sentinel surveillance techniques were used to monitor the incidence of trafficking amongst Cambodian labour migrants in Thailand. Focusing on Poipet border checkpoint, the research self-defines as 'the first research of its kind in the field of human trafficking. In this respect, it signals an important new era in human trafficking research and data collection' (UNIAP 2010: xiii).

The preoccupation with creating totalising modes of mapping of trafficking is evident: 'Human trafficking sentinel surveillance seeks to understand and track the prevalence, severity, trends and changes in human trafficking patterns and flows, both internal and cross-border' (UNIAP 2010: 33).

The main heuristic device to achieve such legibility was to carry out randomised 30-minute interviews over a time period at the Poipet cross-border checkpoint. The use of the Poipet border checkpoint was justified thus:

> The Immigration Office proved to be the most practical locale for interviewees. Deportees often head directly to taxi and bus stands after leaving the Immigration Police station and there is little privacy in between those two points. It was ultimately determined that there was greater privacy behind the gates of the Immigration Police Station rather than outside where there were many people. With interviews being conducted at the Immigration Police Station, however, the data collectors had to be mindful that the proximity to immigration officers had the potential to hinder interviewees' willingness to share information.
>
> (UNIAP 2010: 36)

One of the main rationales for choosing the Poipet border checkpoint was the mere fact that the majority of Cambodian labour migrants who are deported from Thailand are provided through this checkpoint. The report concludes that there are significant levels of exploitation amongst Cambodian labour migrants in Thailand. It is, however, not difficult to point of several problems with this type of methodology.

Leaving the serious ethical dilemmas of working so closely with state authorities within the compounds of a notorious checkpoint aside,[11] we yet again see the reproduction of the Trafficking Protocol in the way that victims of trafficking are identified. Although the report, no doubt, uncovers valuable information regarding Cambodian labour migrants, it is worth considering the workings at play in generating authoritative trafficking data. By asking deportees specific questions geared towards the three elements of the UN trafficking definition, we get what is a common tendency within survey research; it reproduces what it seeks to find. For example, the report notes that the risk of trafficking increases with the number of brokers used in the migration process. Just as the aforementioned report on Burmese migrants, there is little evidence provided in the report which demonstrates that such brokering practices consist of coherent forms of operations (something which the Trafficking Protocol itself suggests). Rather than contemplating the very real possibility that the increasing number of brokers constitutes disjointed migration trajectories with unexpected outcomes, the report chooses to let these selected variables pass off as evidence of trafficking networks. Hence, the report contributes to the reproduction of an essentialist unitary trafficking narrative concerning recruitment.

The report does not only need to somehow articulate authoritative knowledge in terms of how trafficked victims are identified but also to demonstrate that it indeed can assess overall trafficking trends. In other words, its methodology cannot merely be individualising (who is and who is not a trafficked victim) but also totalising (within the realm of probability, the total number of Cambodian trafficking victims is X). It is worth noting that there is no coincidence that the Thai–Cambodian border is chosen for this research, as it is widely known that the numbers of Cambodian deportees is relatively high and a large majority of them are deported through Poipet checkpoint. This allows the report to use deportees as a proxy for estimating trafficking numbers.

Yet, problems with applying this method to other contexts are obvious. It is widely know that, in many border areas, only a small fraction of migrants are deported and migrants (whether trafficked, or otherwise) are well outside the purview of deportations. I would very much like to see this methodology applied to, say, the Thai–Lao border, where vast numbers of migrants criss-cross the border for numerous reasons without being caught up in regulatory deportation schemes by states or anti-trafficking programmes. Although the report rhetorically claims encompassment in terms of its estimations, it relies on very selective empiricism to suit programmatic constraints. Institutional logic determines methodology. A border crossing is chosen for research simply because it is possible and convenient for an anti-trafficking organisation to do so.

To be fair, the research has several strengths, one of them being the mere fact that parts of its rationale was to compare deportees who had been subject to exploitation and/or trafficking with other deportees who had more successful experiences working in Thailand. However, if the objective is to discern reasons why different migrants have different migrant outcomes, it seems to warrant different methods than short 30-minute interviews under the purview of migrant officials and police at a notorious checkpoint.[12] This brings me to the question of institutional parameters which shape research and why certain methods are used (and other excluded).

In search of the perfect method: the institutional context of anti-trafficking programming

On the one hand, the trafficking methods discussed above may seem impressive. In a sense, they do what they set out to do. Data are collected and collated, characteristics of migrations are tabulated and estimates are produced. As such, these research programmes legitimate their own functioning. But what does all this mean, and what purpose does it all serve? As pointed out earlier, these research programmes share a set of characteristics which are not explicitly recognised by the trafficking programmes that implement them. Beyond a revelatory function, they seek a grid-like lucidness of mobility where trafficking can be pinpointed within specific territorial parameters. It enables an aerial panoramic view (produced with the use of Geographic Information Systems maps) where trafficking 'hotspots' and clusters of vulnerability come to light. The emphasis on borders (as in the sentinel survey by UNIAP) is no coincidence, as one of the prime surveillance mechanisms for the state has become international borders. As Roy Boyne has pointed out, 'the Panoptical gaze is no longer in the middle but has moved to the edges' (Boyne 2010: 287). All this makes trafficking legible, which no doubt is important from the point of view of donor funding. In doing so, however, it needs to rely on methods that use generic modes of identification to achieve comparability (i.e. the replication of the most widely accepted definition of trafficking) and quantitative survey methods to claim totalised encompassment ('the number of victims in this area is X').

As such, efforts to improve methods on human trafficking resemble what

Bourdieu has termed 'the scholastic point of view' (Bourdieu 1990), where models and abstractions utilised in research exceeds the social reality to which they refer. Attempts to explore the immediateness of meaning and how migrants grasp their life-worlds are surpassed by instruments to construct an understanding, which is entirely exterior to it. In this sense, the trafficking estimation contest, the sentinel surveillance research and other related broadscale research must be understood in its wider meta-context:

> official data are extremely useful for learning about the functioning of the organizations which are engaged in producing them and/or the procedures for defining and limiting the knowable statistical part of the phenomenon. So... trafficking [has] to be defined, classified, adjudicated and registered. We might say... that immigration as well as the trafficking, entering as phenomena in the systems of classification in order to be measured become '*political objects*' insofar as they express, on the one hand the sensitivity of the governmental authorities towards the phenomena and their capacity to provide adequate instruments of information, and on the other they become instruments for obtaining knowledge and confirmation of political decisions.
>
> (Savona and Stefanizzi 2007: 47, emphasis added)

Hence, although from the point of view of anti-trafficking programmes, their research is becoming more scientific, they should rather be considered as political statements (van Ufford 1993) that sets in motion the production of data, which is at the same time shaped by, as well as informing programme operations. The reason why anti-trafficking research tends to take this form has no doubt to do with the fact that this particular programmatic mode of knowledge contributes to the functioning of anti-trafficking programmes. For example, whereas articulating a research problem requires analytical skills and a great deal of subjective judgment, specific methods and instruments (such as using a survey based on a pre-given definition of trafficking) can easily be stipulated in manuals and enables replication. And of course, a positivist rhetoric of promising scientific and reliable estimates is more easily receptive of policy endorsement. Hence, a prioritisation with methods, numbers and statistics suits institutional demands. Although anti-trafficking research is rhetorically driven by needs of trafficked victims and vulnerable migrants, there is always a subtext of the needs of anti-trafficking programmes themselves.

As we have seen, many of these methodologies are technically sophisticated but analytically and theoretically lacking a clear compass. They also seem to be blind to the condition of their own epistemological production. The methodology competition is an interesting case in point. An overenthusiastic emphasis on methods clouds exact reasons why such research ought to be carried out in the first place. Beyond legitimating donor funding ('there are X trafficked victims at this border; subtext: please fund us to combat it'), it is entirely unclear what such estimates in themselves can do to improve the ways in which trafficked victims are assisted. This specific programmatic mode of knowledge production is not

bereft of consequences, as it predisposes anti-trafficking measures to take certain forms. It explains human trafficking in terms of individual behaviour ('X migrants are aware of Y'; 'Z migrants have no access to land but are not at risk of abuse', etc.), which can be targeted from the point of view of policy programming. The overarching bureaucratic trope for this individuating logic is to target vulnerability amongst (individual) labour migrants. Such behaviouralism is neatly recapitulated by Xiang Biao:

> Epistemological behaviouralism sees migration as a distinct behaviour, that is, a particular class of intended human actions taken in response to external stimulus and constraints. Taking this behaviour itself as the starting point of inquiry and the focus of investigation, epistemological behaviouralism imagines disparate human flows into a singular subject that can be analytically isolated, with its externally discernable patterns and internal stable essence to be uncovered.
>
> (Biao 2011: 1)

In other words, these research instruments are heavily positivist in orientation, where human trafficking is cast in light of observable units of behaviour, thereby failing to recognise that trafficking research is not merely instruments for documenting behaviour in a pre-existing world 'out there' but takes part in shaping its object. Hence, the anti-trafficking methods initiatives discussed earlier are arguably emergent forms of governmentalities shaped by transnational linkages of governments, NGOs and international organisations.

Furthermore by individuating the phenomena, the research has a distinct apolitical character. The reports cast no, or little, light on questions of asymmetrical relations of power, structural and institutional reasons for why certain migrants are integrated in migratory labour markets in particular ways. There is a broad academic literature on this topic (for example, Massey *et al.* 1993; Phillips 2009; Tsing 2009) but anti-trafficking organisations seem unaware of it. The recommendations made by these trafficking reports are telling. There is a strong emphasis on awareness raising and training of officials in the ways they deal with suspected victims of trafficking. Very little is being directed towards broader structural reasons why abuse and exploitation of migrants take place.[13] In the few cases where law enforcement is recommended, it remains an individuated focus on the arrest of individual recruiters, traffickers and exploitative employers. The fact that research which employs positivist behaviouralist methodologies end up with recommendations that target individual behaviour is, hence, no surprise. In this sense, the trafficking methods and estimates discussed in this chapter have a distinct conservative dynamism about them as they reproduce (as opposed to challenge) legalistic definitions and concepts of trafficking, as well as sustaining a programmatic gaze on individual behaviour of migrants rather than asking broader questions of the political economy of labour migration. The heavy focus on methods, coupled with the promise of achieving statistically valid estimates of trafficking trends, is not only ambitious but drives attention away from a more careful reflexivity regarding the knowledge production itself. Within this framework, no analytical gaze can be redirected at the anti-trafficking sector itself.

Conclusion

The reader may believe that the aforementioned discussion leads to a conclusion that we often see in the divide between academic and applied research. The academic points to all sorts of hurdles, contradictions and naïvety, before concluding: 'it's more complicated than that'. This is to misread my argument. What I seek to elucidate is that querying the institutional underpinnings of anti-trafficking research is not merely a question of deconstruction in itself but it also reveals inherent practical problems that are perpetuated through anti-trafficking research. Rather than mindless empiricism regarding trends, prevalence and projects that seek to generate diagrammatic surveillance of trafficking trends, very little of this trafficking research is orientated more closely to the needs of the migrants themselves. This is indeed paradoxical, given the individuating nature of these trafficking surveys: despite epistemic behaviouralism (i.e. the individual being the main unit of analysis), it produces remarkably thin insights into how migrants themselves perceive their migration trajectories, how they believe their circumstances can change, as well as the ways in which they evaluate the assistance trafficking organisations seek to provide. And, when it comes to traffickers, brokers and other villains, they remain dark horses of whom we know very little. It is increasingly apparent that there is a serious gap between what anti-trafficking organisations say and do and the way alleged trafficked victims engage with anti-trafficking programmes. As Lisborg (Chapter 2) and Surtees (Chapter 8) point out, many victims, with good reasons, decline assistance from anti-trafficking programmes. Similarly, more detailed studies of recruitment and brokers suggest that assumptions being made by anti-trafficking programmes regarding the modus operandi of traffickers may result in awkward responses and even counter-intentional effects (Molland 2011).

This seems to suggest that, rather than being preoccupied with expansive surveys (which can never result in closer and deeper engagement with migrant labourers), strengthened engagement with migrant populations may generate more fruitful assistance for migrants or, indeed, the uncomfortable recognition that assistance may not be appropriate at all. This may also invite the broader trafficking sector to reconsider the tenacity of applying generic legalistic templates and definitions in their work (such as the dutiful usage of the Trafficking Protocol).

Given the problems I have raised, one may be left wondering who is the audience for such estimations? It is here we see a peculiar circularity as various organisations launch trafficking estimates and large-scale trafficking surveys (which contributes to their symbolic capital within the field of anti-trafficking), which, in turn, becomes resources for other trafficking programmes and trafficking experts to use in their research which in turn contributes to their expertise. As such, it is no surprise that at the time of writing this essay the UNIAP project has

announced yet another trafficking estimation competition.[14] Yet, as this chapter has attempted to illuminate, such trafficking estimates teach us much more about the organisations and researchers who carry them out than the 'real' numbers of trafficking victims.

Notes

1 These criticisms include the commonality of conflating children and women, assuming that poverty causes trafficking as well as acknowledging the complex relationship between legal status and trafficking.

2 In addition to specific measurements, several organisations, such as the Institute of Migration spends considerable resources at developing databases to contribute to mapping trafficking trends. For example, UNESCO has applied sentinel surveillance methods using GIS data on trafficking and HIV Aids in the Mekong region for several years.

3 There is no coincidence that several trafficking reports tend to use GIS data and the use of maps as it symbolically expresses a complete mapping of trafficking 'down there' in which anti-trafficking programmes can gain a synoptic view.

4 In 2003, AFESIP established 'The observatory on trafficking' which aimed to achieve 'scientific consistency' in human trafficking research. In a similar fashion, Steinfatt *et al.* rely heavily on claims of carrying out 'scientific' trafficking research. The irony that ideologically opposed institutions and researchers share in common a rhetorical structure (i.e. claims of scientific objectivity) seems to go unnoticed.

5 This is not to say that the entire trafficking sector adheres to a commitment to more 'scientific' research. In fact, several individuals and organisations are critical of survey instruments. This being said, it is notable that emphasis on improved methods is something that straddle ideological stand in relation to human trafficking.

6 UNIAP has been prominent in providing technical support to several Mekong governments. This includes serving as the secretariat to the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT), providing technical support in drafting trafficking legislation, as well assisting the development of a National Plan of Action in several countries. It is also important to recognise that despite the divergent political and moral debates that have shaped the anti-trafficking protocol, most UN agencies (and even NGOs) that combat trafficking employ the Trafficking Protocol in their work. Hence, despite divergent views of trafficking (legalisation of migration, border control etc.) most anti-trafficking initiatives nonetheless use this conceptualisation of trafficking.

7 It should be noted that the anti-trafficking sector is not homogenous and not all organisations necessarily support such trafficking contests. For example the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) has launched the peer review journal, *Anti-Trafficking Review*, which allows for a far more diverse articulation of analysis than a methods contest.

8 Admittedly, academia is also a field in which there is considerable 'combat' where social, symbolic and political hierarchies shape what is considered 'good research' (Bourdieu 1988; Kuhn 1970). Yet, the ontology of such combat is rather different, as the trafficking estimate competition implies that quality of research can objectively (as opposed to socially) be assessed through a formalised competition. Furthermore, in contrast to academic principles of blind peer review, UNIAP saw no difficulty in appointing their own expert panel (which included some of their own staff) to assess the different contestants.

9 The claim of conducting 'ethnographic' interviews seems very questionable and is very far from what is commonly understood by the term within the discipline of anthropology. The report simply labels semi-structured interviews as 'ethnographic'. A possible reason for such relabelling may be the rhetorical profit by providing a sense of depth and an aura of 'thick description' to the research.

10 Later on, the report claims that there is high risk associated with recruitment that involves paying a fee to a recruiter. However, as the research instrument has by definition excluded mobility facilitation, which is carried out by any other than a 'recruiter' or 'transporter', this is uncomfortably close to a tautology (it is not unreasonable to hypothesise that most brokers, such as 'recruiters' and 'transporters', would seek some form of remuneration).

11 Border checkpoints are one of the main modes in which the state can exercise total scrutiny of mobile subjects. As such, the sentinel surveillance raises ethical questions in the ways it mirrors such state legibility. Given the widespread abuse by state authorities of migrants and deportees, it goes without saying that carrying out interviews with deported migrants at a checkpoint raises obvious ethical concerns (to what extent can a deportee meaningfully consent to an interview within the compound of a migration checkpoint?), as well as reliability in responses. The report claims that due care was taken to address these ethical issues but, at the same time, seems to acknowledge that this was in fact not adhered to. On page 37, the report acknowledges that some respondents feared police overhearing their conversations.

12 Given the obvious sensitivities relating to deportation, one does not need to be a social scientist to understand that responses can be skewed and by approaching informants in more sustained ways (with open ended question) one may be more successful in providing more comprehensive accounts of such migration trajectories.

13 One exception is the works of David Feingold (this volume) but also see his earlier work, which argues for a political economy approach that emphasises structural vulnerability amongst ethnic minorities in Thailand (Feingold 1998, 2000).

14 One would think that, given the self-proclaimed scientific quality of the previous estimates, why then is it required to spend resources on new estimates? The next estimate competition is extremely ambitious as it not only addresses estimation of trafficking victims but also estimations of numbers of traffickers as well as profits generated by them.

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